

## Of bandits and saints: Jesús Malverde and the struggle for place in Sinaloa, Mexico

Price, Patricia L.

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

[www.peerproject.eu](http://www.peerproject.eu)

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Price, P. L. (2005). Of bandits and saints: Jesús Malverde and the struggle for place in Sinaloa, Mexico. *Cultural Geographies*, 12(2), 175-197. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474005eu325oa>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter dem "PEER Licence Agreement zur Verfügung" gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zum PEER-Projekt finden Sie hier: <http://www.peerproject.eu>. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

**gesis**  
Leibniz-Institut  
für Sozialwissenschaften

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under the "PEER Licence Agreement". For more Information regarding the PEER-project see: <http://www.peerproject.eu>. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Mitglied der  
**Leibniz**  
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

# Of bandits and saints: Jesús Malverde and the struggle for place in Sinaloa, Mexico

*Patricia L. Price*

Department of International Relations, Florida International University

---

Jesús Malverde, a bandit who was assassinated in 1909, crystallizes the struggle for place – understood both literally and metaphorically – in northern Mexico. The socially and economically marginal people who revered him in the nineteenth century adore him as a lay saint today. Contention over building a chapel to Malverde in Culiacán, the capital city of the northern Mexican state of Sinaloa, distils broader tensions over the Mexican state's persistent deferral of the poor from inclusion in the official landscape of the nation. Malverde's appropriation by Sinaloa's narcotraffickers as their patron saint extends this symbolic and material claim to legitimacy to include those who exist outside the official boundaries. The border between the sacred and the profane is often a site of social struggle, and the case of Malverde is no exception. While the legend of Malverde may well have been invented, its negotiation has proven remarkably long-lived and powerful in shaping and reshaping the iconographic and material landscapes of social inclusion and exclusion. Malverde thus offers an empty signifier whose multiple interpretations yield a surplus of symbolic meanings and material production based on the circulation, negotiation, appropriation, and reinterpretation of those meanings.

## **The legend of Jesús Malverde**

Jesús Malverde was born Jesús Juárez Mazo in or around 1870 in a small town near the capital city of Culiacán in the state of Sinaloa, located on Mexico's Pacific coast about 500 miles south of the border with the United States.<sup>1</sup> In 1877, Mexico's long-ruling and notoriously corrupt ruler, Porfirio Díaz,<sup>2</sup> sent his crony, Francisco Cañedo, to govern the state, which he did until his death in 1909.<sup>3</sup> The arrival of the railroads to Sinaloa, during Malverde's youth, brought with it large-scale hacienda agriculture in sugar and henequen, and greater economic inequities than ever before for Sinaloa's large peasant population. It is held that Malverde's own parents died of hunger or a curable illness, and that this was the catalyst for his turn to a life of crime. While Malverde was said to have worked variously on the railroads, as a carpenter, or as a tailor, he soon joined the ranks of bandits that roamed Mexico's countryside at the end of the nineteenth century. He reportedly stole gold coins from the rich hacienda owners living in Culiacán and threw them in the doorways of the poor at night, quickly becoming a local Robin Hood figure beloved by the local downtrodden.

Many versions exist of how Jesús Juárez Mazo acquired his nickname 'Malverde'.<sup>4</sup> Some say that because he camouflaged himself with banana leaves, the wealthy people he terrorized began to call him 'mal-verde', or 'bad green' (green devil). In any event, his unremitting thievery deeply annoyed Governor Cañedo, himself a wealthy man with many wealthy and influential associates in the area. Promising Malverde a pardon if he was successful, Cañedo supposedly challenged him to steal his sword, while another version holds that the object was nothing less than Cañedo's own daughter. As a carpenter, Malverde was familiar with the layout of houses of the rich. Slipping into Cañedo's house at night like *un ánima*, a spirit who was not even sensed by Cañedo's dogs, Malverde successfully relieved the governor of his sword (or his daughter). He even dared to leave a note with 'Jesús M. was here' on a wall. His manhood compromised either way, Cañedo ordered Malverde hunted down.

There exist several versions of Malverde's death on 3 May 1909. Some suggest that he was betrayed by his *compadre*, who cut off Malverde's feet and turned him over to the authorities for the reward money. Other versions hold that he died in the brush of an illness, or was wounded and crawled into a bread oven to die. Depictions of Malverde's death show him hanging from a mesquite tree, and this is how many say he was killed, hanged by the government posse sent to hunt him down (Figure 1). Cañedo reportedly refused to allow the body to be buried, and in order to make an example of the bandit left the body hanging from the mesquite tree until his bones fell from the rope. Supposedly, peasants threw stones at his corpse to cover it, in a final gesture to their beloved Malverde.

One day, in hopes of Malverde's beneficence continuing beyond death, a milkman, bemoaning the loss of his income – his cow – asked Malverde to return the animal. As he threw the stone on Malverde's ersatz tomb, he heard the 'mooring' of the cow behind him. With his posthumous intervention on behalf of the poor, Malverde was transformed from legendary historical figure to lay saint. While not officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church, Malverde has nonetheless been granted quasi-religious status in the minds of many *Sinaloenses*. Over time, his fame has grown and he has performed countless miracles typical of folk saints: restored health, luck in love, and protection from evildoers. Today his shrine in Sinaloa announces itself in large neon letters and is open around the clock, while Malverde's purported final resting place – now located in the middle of a used car lot across the street from the shrine – still houses a large pile of stones, votive candles, images, and a plaster bust of Malverde enshrined in a bird cage (Figures 2 and 3).

Because versions of his story have him employed as a carpenter, a railroad worker or a tailor, he provides protection to those who labour in these trades. Because Malverde may have had his feet cut off when he died, he is said to have a particular affinity for the lame and limbless, in addition to his ongoing devotion to the poor of Sinaloa. Alms gathered at the shrine are used to purchase wheelchairs and crutches for those who need them, as well as providing caskets for the burial of poor Sinaloans and free breakfasts for hungry local children. True to his rural origins, Malverde still helps those who make their living from the land. Inside his shrine rest corncobs, tomatoes, and jars



FIGURE 1 Devotional card depicting Jesús Malverde hanging from a mesquite tree.

full of beans or floating shrimp, offerings from the region's farmers and fishermen thanking Malverde for a bountiful harvest.

Yet not all inside the shrine is humble and handwritten, and not all of the region's farmers grow winter vegetables. For Sinaloa produces a great deal of the marijuana and heroin paste exported to the United States from Mexico, and funnels Colombian cocaine northward to the United States as well.<sup>5</sup> The notorious drug king-pins who hail from this state are the central figures in Mexico's drug cartels, among them the Arellano Félix brothers, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, 'El Güero' Palma and Rafael Caro Quintero, who masterminded the assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1985. Burnished brass plaques line the walls of the chapel, bearing the family names of the state's drug king-pins, thanking Malverde for his assistance and bearing the key words *de Sinaloa a California* ('from Sinaloa to California', alluding to



FIGURE 2 Jesús Malverde chapel, Culiacán, Sinaloa.

---



FIGURE 3 Malverde's final resting place?

---

the drug corridor between these two places). Efraín Benítez Ayala, assistant Malverde chapel caretaker, reports that large amounts in US dollars are deposited in the collection box with some frequency, and intimates that it is the *narcos* who are responsible for these donations.<sup>6</sup> Though no one leaves physical evidence of a bountiful marijuana harvest in the way that they do of, say, their garbanzo bean harvests, there are ample references to the crop emblazoned on the baseball caps, key rings and medallions for sale inside the chapel. Largely because of the curiosity of the media, both in Mexico and the United States, many outside of Sinaloa know of Malverde today as *el narcosantón*, the patron saint of narcotraffickers. In addition to his overseeing the activities of tailors, railroad workers, the lame and limbless and the downtrodden, Malverde is said to help drug growers produce good harvests. He protects dealers from stray bullets and police raids, gets relatives out of jail, and watches over shipment of narcotics. Because Malverde was a thief, he is attributed with the power to make things disappear.<sup>7</sup> Thus for drug dealers who wish to cross the border with their cargo of contraband undetected, he is a logical choice for protection: 'Jesús Malverde, with your infinite power, make my plane invisible like your horse, and don't let them catch me!'<sup>8</sup>

Though narcotraffickers have adopted Malverde as their patron saint, Efraín was adamant that neither the shrine nor faith in Malverde's powers was limited to this group. 'He protects all sorts of people, all social classes'.<sup>9</sup> Efraín felt that journalists had contributed to the sensationalization of Malverde's story, by focusing attention on his association with narcotraffickers to the exclusion of what many Sinaloans considered his more important role as patron saint of the downtrodden.<sup>10</sup> According to Arturo Lizárraga Hernández, member of the social sciences faculty at the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa in Mazatlán, while people from all socioeconomic levels visit Malverde's shrine,

Those who most visit his chapel on the Avenida Independencia in Culiacán, Sinaloa, are the socially marginal of all types: the poorest, the handicapped, pickpockets, thugs, prostitutes, drug traffickers and drug addicts, in sum, the stigmatized who, in civil or religious iconography don't find anyone who looks like them, in whom to confide and in whose hands to put their lives.<sup>11</sup>

Malverde's devotion to a broad spectrum of Sinaloan society is palpable in the chapel's interior, which is visually dominated by the shiny brass plaques left by narcotraffickers, yet which also holds a range of more humble offerings: bunches of *chiles* and ears of corn, handwritten notes thanking Malverde for the recovery of health, photographs of brides thanking Malverde for helping them find true love, and letters from migrants who have successfully crossed the border to Arizona. It is not coincidental that Malverde's image in the chapel itself and in memorabilia sold around the chapel is often coupled with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint and its most widely beloved popular religious figure, who is also believed to intercede on behalf of Mexico's poor and downtrodden.

Though Malverde's story, and its contemporary association with the glamorous and violent world of narcotrafficking, is of intrinsic interest, it speaks to issues of broader concern to contemporary critical cultural geographers as well. Specifically, Jesús Malverde – his image, his story and faith in him – is an important figure in the struggle



for place in Sinaloa and especially in the capital city of Culiacán. Such struggles over meaning in the landscape are, in turn, both reflective and constitutive of larger struggles. Thus the contention surrounding Malverde can be approached as what J. B. Jackson described as the tension between the official and the vernacular landscape;<sup>12</sup> in this case, between the official landscape of the Church and the State and the popular religious and social landscape of Sinaloa's down-and-out.<sup>13</sup> The ongoing controversy over Malverde raises questions such as: What 'place' should the popular religious devotion to a deceased bandit occupy in the spiritual, as well as physical, landscape of Culiacán? What is sacred and what is profane? What is criminal behaviour and what is legitimate political activity? Whose voice and vision should be expressed in the urban landscape of Sinaloa's capital city, and whose voice and vision should be erased from historical memory? These are difficult questions to answer, because they probe the always contentious, shifting and ceaseless struggle over what should be sanctioned as legitimate and what should be eradicated as heretical.

In the balance of this essay, I first turn to the battle over the gravesite of Jesús Malverde in Culiacán. The building of Malverde's main chapel in Culiacán, Sinaloa, illustrates how the contention over Malverde's presence in the landscape is both symptomatic and constitutive of broader struggles over social legitimacy. Because the figure of Jesús Malverde is so prominent in the social imaginary of Sinaloans,<sup>14</sup> struggles over what role to give his memory and how to mark his presence (or not) can become points of bitter contention over local pride and place identity. '[T]he significance of space in landscape terms, the allotment of land for private or public use, is that it makes the social order visible. Space, even a small plot of ground, identifies the occupant and gives him status ...'<sup>15</sup> If the status of the individual in question, or the larger social order of which she or he is a part, is a matter of debate, then it is reasonable to search for clues to both the social order and its contestation in the landscape.

The meanings and uses of the sites associated with Jesús Malverde take on quite different contours, however, depending upon who is telling the tale. As I shall suggest in subsequent sections of this essay, which explore the landscapes of popular religiosity and social banditry with respect to Malverde, the neat dichotomies suggested by opposing pairs of terms such as 'official and vernacular' are not, in fact, so neatly separable. Thus the controversy over a chapel in Culiacán both brings into focus longstanding contentions in Mexico's broader social, cultural and political landscapes, and suggests that it is not so easy to distinguish the sacred from the profane, the legitimate official from the brigand, the legend from the material circumstances. For, as I shall conclude, though the legend of Jesús Malverde may indeed be fabricated out of whole cloth, the persistent circulation, devotion to, and tangible landscape manifestations of his tale illustrate that it is neither easy nor especially productive to attempt to tease fact from fiction in this case. I will suggest that, instead, Malverde constitutes an empty signifier, an infinitely productive node that has given rise to a multitude of meanings that are circulated, appropriated and reinterpreted in the ongoing struggle for place.

## The struggle for the sacred

The tale of the construction of Malverde's chapel is as colourful and as riddled with productive inconsistencies as the legend of his life and death.<sup>16</sup> In the late 1970s, then Governor of the state of Sinaloa, Alfonso G. Calderón, decided to construct a series of new public buildings for the growing capital city of Culiacán. Among the planned buildings was a *Centro Cultural Sinaloense* (Sinaloan Cultural Center) that was to be located on the very land that reportedly held Malverde's remains, requiring that the pile of stones marking his ersatz tomb be removed. After several years of public protests and debate by disgruntled residents who did not wish to disturb the site, the construction was ordered to proceed. However, strange and frightening portends occurred. As workers prepared to break ground, all of Culiacán turned out to witness the event. The governor, who usually donned his hard hat to ceremoniously turn the first shovel of dirt in such projects, decided judiciously to blend into the crowd instead. When he did, 'the stones [over Malverde's remains] jumped like popcorn, as if they wanted to entomb he who, sacrilegiously, wished to move the immovable'.<sup>17</sup> The man driving the bulldozer had to get drunk in order to work up the courage to demolish the site, yet the bulldozer smoked and finally broke down when it touched the grave. By the time another bulldozer was brought in, night had fallen, and the people gathered there cheered thinking that Malverde had won the day, but this time the bulldozer was able to remove the stones, candles, and notes asking for intercession. It is said that the tearful driver of the bulldozer died shortly afterward. As the construction progressed, windows in the new buildings shattered mysteriously, equipment vanished and odd accidents befell construction workers.<sup>18</sup>

In 1980, the municipal government relented to the people's wishes and provided a nearby parcel of land for a new chapel to Malverde, now the site of his main shrine. As the land around the railroad tracks was developed and the new government buildings went up, the old points of reference were erased and it was impossible to know where, exactly, Malverde's bones lay. But during the hot summer months of 1984, a large ring of dead vegetation appeared in a still-vacant lot. A waxy stain appeared in the circle, the molten accumulation of years of candles, prayers and miracles rising to the surface of the earth and marking Malverde's grave. This place, now in a used car lot across the busy divided road from the new chapel, once again became a site of intense devotion.

Thus Malverde's erasure from and reappearance in the urban landscape would seem to pit the wishes of the outlaw saint and his motley band of devotees against those of the state, the vernacular landscape of popular devotion against the official landscape of government buildings, the fantastic legend held dear by the poor against the monolithic account of state history as embodied in the *Centro Cultural Sinaloense*. The same might be said for the relationship between Malverde's chapel and the position of local Catholic officials. Though a figure inspiring intense devotion, Malverde exists outside the realm of religion as sanctioned by the Catholic church. He is unlikely ever to be elevated to sainthood; indeed, local church officials in Culiacán complain bitterly that devotion to Malverde diverts not only the spiritual energy of the faithful but their monetary donations as well. Thus Malverde is often portrayed in stark terms: a



'disrupter of souls', a 'thief in the kingdom of God', and a 'Lucifer' by the city's clergy, while held by his followers to be *el ángel de los pobres* (the angel of the poor).

Left here, the story says that Malverde defied both the church and the state and in the end got his way. Through his acting beyond the grave on behalf of the poor, their presence was inscribed symbolically and materially in the urban fabric. Yet the lines separating the official and the vernacular, legitimate and illegitimate, sacred and profane, legal and outlaw are never fixed or ever tremendously clear, and the case of Malverde's gravesite is no exception. Writing of the Mexican Revolution, James Scott has framed the 'the thorny relationship between hegemonic processes and resistance' thus:<sup>19</sup>

[We] cannot simply take it for granted that state elites have a 'hegemonic project' at all ... and more important, although one may be able to speak of a hegemonic project of state elites, one must always speak of popular culture and resistance to such projects in the plural. The strength and resilience of popular resistance to any hegemonic project lies precisely in its plurality ... since it does not speak with one voice, it cannot be silenced with a single blow of rhetoric.<sup>20</sup>

It is rumored, for example, that political officials and the Mexican federal police surreptitiously visit Malverde's shrine to ask for intercession in local political and judicial affairs.<sup>21</sup> Mexican dramatist Sergio López Sánchez quips, ironically, that the new government buildings are simply a larger version of the earlier monument to a thief,<sup>22</sup> implying that the state government as well as common criminals have a history of duplicity when it comes to the ordinary Sinaloan. Indeed, a longstanding belief in the Mexican popular imaginary is that authority figures in the guise of police, bureaucrats and clergy are to be feared for their history of corrupt behavior before they are to be trusted. To the chagrin of local politicians and religious leaders, Jesús Malverde remains prominent on the urban horizon of Culiacán, a constant reminder of the extra-official nature of much of Sinaloa's past and present. Perhaps Malverde and his spiritual as well as physical disruption of the city have proven so difficult to eradicate precisely because Malverde, and more importantly what he stands for, is so central to the truth on which, like it or not, the state and its capital city are founded.

### ***The angel of the poor, or a thief in the kingdom of God?***

[Malverde] is a disrupter of souls, a thief in the kingdom of God and a supposed Lucifer who calls into question the omnipotence of the creator.<sup>23</sup>

They call him Mal-Verde ... but he never did evil. To no one. On the contrary, he always helped the poor.<sup>24</sup>

In his status as a lay saint, Jesús Malverde does not stand alone in the iconographic landscape of popular religiosity along the US–Mexico border. Daniel Arreola, for example, discusses popular religious pilgrimage sites located in the eastern extreme of the border between South Texas and several northern Mexican states.<sup>25</sup> Among these are the birthplace and gravesite of El Niño Fidencio in Espinazo, located in the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León, and Don Pedrito Jaramillo's gravesite near

Falfurrias, Texas. In their lifetimes, both men were legendary healers whose powers, like those of Malverde, continued posthumously, and who have become elevated to the status of lay saints, though the Catholic church does not officially recognize them. On the western end of the US–Mexico border, Malverde is accompanied by the Tijuana figure of Juan Soldado, a common soldier assassinated in 1938 and now the patron saint of undocumented border crossers.<sup>26</sup> As with Malverde's shrine, the gravesites of these folk saints constitute for the faithful sacred spaces of devotion, pilgrimage and divine intervention.<sup>27</sup> Yet for all their sway in the popular imaginary and practice of subregional groups, these figures and the places associated with them may be tolerated, but they will never be officially recognized by the Catholic church as legitimately holy.

The official stance of the Catholic church, however, is not the only face of Catholicism as practised in Mexico. In the state of Sinaloa, for example, the Culiacán diocese complains bitterly about the diversion of souls and contributions due to the lure of Malverde's chapel. However, Malverde chapel founder Eligio González looks for ways to bring local church officials into partnership with his 'congregation' at Malverde's chapel, recounting that he had once invited Padre Melitón, a priest from Culiacán's landmark Guadalupean *Iglesia de La Lomita* (Church on the Hill) to bless the Malverde chapel. Arturo Lizárraga Hernández recounts that 'this priest had good things to say about Don Eligio and his works and, in particular, congratulates him because he helps drug addicted youth who hang out at the Chapel and the railway station through his advice and meals',<sup>28</sup> and quotes Eligio González as saying: '[the priests of Culiacán] don't bother me. They just tell me sometimes that I'm bringing the faithful over to Malverde's church. I answer them that no, they come on their own.'<sup>29</sup> So while the official line of the church may oppose Malverde as heretical, the lived relationship between the Malverde chapel founder and the clergy of Culiacán appears to be much less oppositional. In some cases, both may perceive their mission vis-à-vis the downtrodden of Culiacán to be the same.

Such a behavioural shift from rigid vertical hierarchy to more active contact with the poor (who, after all, constitute the majority of the Catholic flock worldwide) is not limited to Culiacán: it is hemispheric. Throughout Latin America, the Catholic church has come under siege, criticized for being unresponsive to the poverty and injustices suffered by the region's poor. This perception of rigidity and exclusivity has led to declining traditional Roman Catholic membership, inroads made by evangelical Protestantism and the persistence or resurgence of folk religions and lay saints like Jesús Malverde.<sup>30</sup> Thus the collaborative stance taken by Padre Melitón may well be indicative of a larger, strategic willingness to work with, even embrace, alternative faith-based venues such as Malverde's chapel, rather than rejecting them outright.

In fact, religiosity in Mexico has long been a highly syncretic affair. The practice of tolerating, embracing and at times incorporating indigenous religious elements into practised Catholicism has, since the time of the Spanish conquest, been one of the keys to its widespread acceptance amongst a heterogeneous population. The appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531 to the indigenous peasant Juan Diego, for example,

illustrates the longstanding syncretic nature of Mexican religious practice. The fact that she spoke Nahuatl to him, the transformation of the barren hillside where she appeared into a verdant, crystalline paradise, and the sun rays that framed her figure spoke in clear symbolic terms to Juan Diego as an indigenous man; yet the roses of Castile that she begged him to take to the Bishop Zumárraga in Mexico City were directed toward the Spaniards. The turquoise colour of her cape, the band about her waist and the flower in its center, the Virgin's brown skin, and her down-cast eyes were all powerful symbols that were laden with meaning for the indigenous population of central Mexico, and these were blended seamlessly with elements that spoke to Iberian religious sensibilities of the time: the medieval European posing and technique of her depiction, her name 'Guadalupe' was the same as the local patroness of Extremadura, Spain, where the majority of Spanish conquerors hailed from, and her insistence that she was the mother of the one true God. Guadalupe's basilica was eventually constructed at the site of her appearance to Juan Diego, as ordered. Importantly, this hill was also the devotional site of Tonantzín, the earth goddess of Nahuatl-speaking people. Thus the iconographic landscape, both literal and figurative, incorporated both indigenous Mexican and Iberian Catholic elements and fashioned a powerfully meaningful (if not uncontroversial) religious landscape.<sup>31</sup>

That which is held sacred is rarely, if ever, universally agreed upon. Rather, societies typically face ongoing struggles over what, and who, should qualify as holy. These struggles are often recorded on the landscape, if not directly spatially negotiated, as was the case with the building of Malverde's shrine in Culiacán. The landscape lends not just a measure of fixity or permanence to these debates, it also introduces a certain stickiness to the ongoing negotiations over the social designation of the sacred and the profane. In its tendency to gather elements of indeterminate or controversial valence, the landscape can be understood as an active partner in constructing the indeterminacy that often surrounds the distinction of sacred from profane.

The work of several contemporary critical cultural geographers has explored how the social designation of the sacred is an important instance of the more general struggle for place that is at the heart of landscape.<sup>32</sup> In part, this recent scholarship continues in the tradition of humanist geographers, who have long pondered the spatiality of the social function of the sacred.<sup>33</sup> In addition, this scholarship by geographers draws upon, and extends, explorations of sacred spaces in other disciplines.<sup>34</sup> The Greek anthropologist Mircea Eliade provides a classic theorization of the spatial dynamics of sanctification. Author of *The sacred and the profane*, Eliade had begun to discuss religious faith and the transformation of space nearly fifty years ago.<sup>35</sup> It is his notion of hierophany – the manifestation of the sacred in the profane – that has provided an important approach for understanding the landscape designation of sacred spaces. For Eliade, hierophany entails a transmutation of space that is of fundamental importance for meaning-making by cultures. Without sacred spaces, Eliade asserts, human societies are in essence rootless. In other words, it is the irruption of the sacred in the profane and the spatial differentiation that this sets in motion which allows us to become fully human.

For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world. In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, as Eliade's critics have pointed out, rather than occupying a central site, sacred spaces are in fact often located at the margins, literally and figuratively. The recent appearances, for example, of images of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a bank window in Clearwater, Florida, a twig in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, an ice cream stain in Houston, Texas, and a hot water heater left out to rust in a backyard in Douglas, Arizona, all constitute everyday examples of hierophany (Figure 4). Though revered in the local popular religious beliefs of these places, the Catholic Church is not likely officially to recognize such apparitions as legitimate manifestations of the most holy Mother Mary, nor are the sites associated with them likely to be formally designated as sacred. Instead, these examples of everyday hierophany question the social designation of holiness as clearly and always extraordinary though their very ordinarieness, by 'sliding in and out of the profane and common places around them'.<sup>37</sup> Rather than constituting a firm *axis mundi*, they often as not challenge the central pillars of the society in question. Writes Belden Lane, 'Religion isn't always a matter of otherworldly transcendence. It continually sets up camp in the ordinary ... The sacred place, therefore, has the potential of being as disruptive as it is integrative'.<sup>38</sup>

David Chidester and Edward Linenthal suggest that the designation of sacred spaces is always a political act, not, as Eliade suggested, a mystical or *sui generis* occurrence.<sup>39</sup> In their exploration of American sacred spaces, Chidester and Linenthal note that traditional Hawaiian burial grounds (*heiau*) and the contemporary secular sacred site of the Pearl Harbor attack during the second world war are both intimately bound up in the promotion of such decidedly profane activities as tourism and economic development. Moreover, the designation of meaning to these sites is anything but unproblematic, as both traditional Hawaiian sacred spaces and the Pearl Harbor site are the locus of intense interpretive conflict over nationality, imperialism, economic empowerment and disempowerment, the expression of cultural heritage, the right to self-determination and freedom of religious expression. It is the wider political context of the ritual production and reproduction of spaces as sacred, the material relations of property ownership and the often complex power interests at stake that should be the focus of analysis of sacred space according to Chidester and Linenthal, rather than simply the act of hierophany itself.

[T]he assertion that the sacred irrupts or manifests is a mystification that obscures the symbolic labor that goes into making space sacred. It erases all the hard work that goes into choosing, setting aside, consecrating, venerating, protecting, defending, and redefining sacred places. This mystification is even more seriously misleading, however, when it covers up the symbolic violence of domination or exclusion that is frequently involved in the making of sacred space ... power and purity are not inherent in sacred space. Power is always at stake in struggles over inclusion and exclusion.<sup>40</sup>



FIGURE 4 Our Lady of Clearwater, Florida.

---

One could certainly understand Jesús Malverde – his narrative and image, people's faith in them, and their manifestations on the landscape – as constituting an irruption of the sacred in the profane. Malverde-as-everyday-hierophany 'reveals an absolute fixed

point, a centre' around which some contemporary Sinaloans can orient their peripatetic, precarious and illegitimated existences. Religions have always been about making meaning in a chaotic world, and in this respect Malverde provides a much-needed point of orientation and indeed legitimacy for many.

Yet the wider circumstances of Malverde's life and death, and his contemporary popularity as a subregional lay saint, also demand the sort of contextual analysis suggested by Eliade's critics. The controversy over the construction of Malverde's chapel and the persistent reverence of a spot in the middle of a used car lot only rumored to hold Malverde's remains illustrates that much more than the veracity of the tale of a historical figure-cum-lay saint is at stake. Sinaloa is still a largely rural Mexican state, peripheral geographically to the centre of power located in faraway Mexico City, and culturally marginal to the urban, cosmopolitan image of modern Mexico presented by its leaders. Many Sinaloans today have migrated north to the United States, particularly to Arizona, where they live and work on yet another periphery on the mainstream of US society. Should the unsanctioned expressions of religious faith of these Sinaloans be allowed to manifest such an important point of reference on the urban and cultural identity of the state? At stake here is a long-contested politics of class, place and historical memory in Mexican society, a struggle that is wrought in no small part in and through the landscape.

## Stealing landscape

Sinaloa is one of those places in Mexico where justice isn't blind and the lawless aren't always the bad guys. Having the government as an enemy can improve a reputation.<sup>41</sup>

Malverde's ascendance to contemporary prominence in Sinaloa coincides with the rise of highly organized drug trafficking from and through Mexico to the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>42</sup> Today, his shrines are rumored to span the drug corridor from as far south as Cali, Colombia, Culiacán and Tijuana in Mexico, and north as far as Phoenix, Arizona (where many Sinaloans have settled), and Los Angeles, California.<sup>43</sup> Together, these shrines constitute a north–south corridor tracing the flow of contraband moved northward by Mexico's Tijuana cartel. Malverde has become a central figure in the pantheon of the so-called narcoculture that has accompanied the drug trade and that is palpable on both sides of the US–Mexico border. *Narcocultura* thrives in cultural artefacts such as popular music (*narcocorridos*), men's fashion steeped in drug dealer chic (*narcomoda*), and the gargantuan, ostentatiously decorated houses of those enriched by the drug trade (*narquitectura*):

In Phoenix and other Arizona cities, police increasingly find Malverde medallions around the necks of the drug thugs – often from Sinaloa – they encounter in drug busts. In Los Angeles, Malverde believers light candles and leave offerings at another chapel to the dark-eyed, heavy-browed 'saint'. And when Sinaloa's migrants return home, often the first place they stop is Malverde's chapel.<sup>44</sup>

The romanticized image of Jesús Malverde as a misunderstood but noble robber has provided a potent symbolic weapon to the public relations arsenal of narcotraffickers.



Considered officially both in Mexico and the United States at the level of terrorists in the war on drugs, the few narcotraffickers successful and long-lived enough to amass fortunes like to promote themselves as contemporary Robin Hoods, stealing from rich gringos and giving back to the poor of their home state in Mexico. Apparently, many Sinaloans are in agreement, prompting journalist Anita Snow to assert that 'drug dealers are saints to many in Northern Mexico'.<sup>45</sup> And there is more than a grain of truth to the assertions of the drug lords. Sinaloa's economy lives and dies (sometimes quite literally) by the drug trade. Scores of drug-related jobs are created for local residents, while the state, traditionally modern Mexico's largest employer, is forever downsizing and rural areas like most of the state of Sinaloa are left further and further behind. Unlike the government, drug traffickers have financed a host of local improvements in Sinaloa. The late drug king-pin Amado Carrillo Fuentes, for example, built a church, a kindergarten and a volleyball court in his hometown of Guamuchilito.<sup>46</sup> Though quantifying the precise monetary value of the contributions of narcotrafficking to local economies verges on 'science fiction', as Francisco Thoumi has noted in the case of Colombia, it is palpable that Sinaloan communities have benefited from the influx of drug money into their communities.<sup>47</sup> Though there may be strikingly violent downsides to a regional economic dependence on growing and shipping contraband, there are also benefits at the grassroots level, and it is the 'generalized prosperity fuelled by drug profits' that Sinaloa's drug lords are intent on highlighting.<sup>48</sup> As Culiacán's police chief, José Luis Esteban Martínez, remarked: 'It is this blurring of the line between good and bad that the area's narcos . . . want to encourage' in their routine and visible reinforcement of an association with the image of Jesús Malverde.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the boundary between noble robber and common criminal is unclear at best in the case of Mexico's drug king-pins. Far more clear, however, is the fact that drugs and their accompanying cultural patterns are undeniably part of the unofficial face of the official relationship that Mexican and United States politicians have tried so hard to fashion around supposedly such clear-cut and cleaned-up legislative tactics as NAFTA, immigration reform, Operation Gatekeeper, international drug certification and so on. Like the waxy stain around Malverde's grave, *narco-cultura*, *narcotraficantes*, and their cultural artefacts just keep bleeding up and around official attempts to bulldoze them out of sight. In the case of Malverde, the contention over marking his grave, over constructing a chapel to him, as well as ongoing discord over his presence in the contemporary cultural landscape, signals just this sort of ambivalence regarding the legitimacy that should be accorded to an outlaw figure. It both reflects and navigates sociocultural tensions over what sorts of persons and activities should in fact be designated 'outlaw'. Though he did not treat the case of Malverde specifically, Mexicanist historian Gilbert Joseph has noted that in regard to popular protest, the criminalization of bandit figures such as Malverde has long been a strategy by the state to discredit particular forms of social protest:

For example, references to a 'bandit village' might not describe a nest of thieves but indicate instead that much of the population of a pueblo is resisting state forces. Repeated mention of 'regional contagion' might reveal more about solidarity and enthusiasm among a variety of groups within an area than about the rapid spread of deviance. Similarly, official references to 'lawlessness' might tell more about collective defiance of

what had come to be regarded as bad laws or administrative practices than about rampant, wanton criminality ... [F]or in defining as crime what it knew to be protest, the state sought to strip the insurgents' actions of any claim to political legitimacy.<sup>50</sup>

Malverde's legend resonates with longstanding scholarly inquiry into social banditry. Eric Hobsbawm's classic exploration of social banditry in Italy and elsewhere in Europe provides a landmark analysis of this phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> Almost to the letter, Malverde provides an illustration of the social or noble bandit, as opposed to the common 'blood and vengeance' criminal. In accordance with Hobsbawm's description of the social bandit, Malverde is a peasant who becomes catalysed by an incident (the death of his parents by hunger or disease) that is seen as tragic or righteous by the poor but not necessarily by the wealthy, who instead perceive the event as unremarkable at best. As is the case with social bandits, he transforms himself into a figure that steals from the rich and gives to the poor. Malverde, as with all social bandits, holds strong ties to his natal territory, uses disguise to elude capture (in his case, the ability to slip in and out of Cañedo's house like a ghost), is a solitary figure and has experienced a sort of immortality (in Malverde's case, the transformation into a lay saint after death). Finally, he turns to a life of banditry on the heels of a larger social transformation; in this case, the modernization of Sinaloa through the coming of the railroads and large-scale agriculture.

As ongoing debates on banditry in the Latin Americanist literature have underscored, elaboration on Hobsbawm's taxonomy of banditry has tended to devolve into rather sterile discussions of whether the particular figure in question is in fact truly a social bandit or merely a common criminal.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, as his critics have pointed out repeatedly, Hobsbawm's failure to connect banditry to peasant protest and resistance, and his early insistence on banditry as 'archaic' or 'prepolitical', constitutes an enormous shortcoming in understanding the connections between banditry and the role of the peasantry in social change. Yet Hobsbawm did note: "[I]t seems that Robin-Hoodism is most likely to become a major phenomenon when [peasant societies'] traditional equilibrium is upset: during and after periods of abnormal hardship, such as famines and wars, or at the moments when the jaws of the dynamic modern world seize the static communities in order to destroy and transform them'.<sup>53</sup> Later, Hobsbawm went on to remark on how nineteenth-century Mexico became infamous for its brigands, who both challenged the authority and (at least on the surface) the order of the Porfirio Díaz years, and who, 'with sympathetic hindsight ... might appear as precursors of the Mexican Revolution'.<sup>54</sup>

A large literature amongst historians has focused on social banditry in the Americas.<sup>55</sup> With specific regard to Mexico, several scholars have noted, following Hobsbawm's suggestion, the close association between social upheaval and the emergence of brigandage.<sup>56</sup> The most important critical juncture in modern Mexican history is the Revolution of 1910–17. José Manuel Valenzuela Arce suggests: 'The social bandit was a bridge between personal indignation and a broader social movement: the Revolution. The social bandit was one of the forms assumed by the desperation of the impoverished peon, the landless peasant, the undermined miner ...'.<sup>57</sup> In broader terms, Paul Vanderwood suggests that bandit archetypes evolved over the course of post-Independence Mexican society from the aggressive brigands characteristic of the

wars of Independence in the early nineteenth century, the powerful bandit gangs of mid-century, the lone bandits characteristic of the Porfirio Díaz years at the close of the nineteenth century (of whom Jesús Malverde is an example), and finally the bandit-patriots acting to shape modern Mexico during the Revolution.<sup>58</sup> Whether the narcotraffickers are in fact shrewd 'bad guys' who merely fashion their images around that of 'good guys in disguise', or whether they in fact constitute a contemporary type of social bandit is a matter of some debate. However, if, as many have suggested, Mexico has made the transition from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary society over the course of the past decade or so,<sup>59</sup> might this contemporary critical juncture be expected to offer up its own contemporary brigands? One might productively ask if narco-traffickers in fact provide just the sort of provocative challenge to authority that bandits in Mexico have always offered.

For the purposes of this essay, however, it is the continued disruption of the line between the criminal and the legitimate social actor, and the negotiation of this boundary in and through the landscape, that is of most interest. Using the example of Mexico's famed *rurales* (federal police), Vanderwood asserts that it has historically been difficult to distinguish the enforcers of the law from the brigands who challenge it. Indeed, bandits have often become policemen, and policemen have turned toward banditry from time to time in Mexican history. Given the alleged ties between Mexico's contemporary political elite, police and drug lords, it does not seem too much of a stretch to see narcotraffickers as, in some important ways, modern-day bandits.<sup>60</sup>

Banditry flourishes in those geo-political interstices where central control and influence hold limited sway and where judicial influence is weakest. Many academics have relegated banditry mainly to the outlands, distant from the so-called seat of power, the national capital. They treat it as a defensive strategy. But banditry can be aggressive and challenging; it is not nearly as defensive as some think, and it frequently tests the limits of state control, at times within eyeshot of the capital itself, where brigands often have important contacts.<sup>61</sup>

As with the slippage between the sacred and the profane noted in the previous section, it is the ability of the figure of Malverde – and of the narcotraffickers who have adopted him as their patron saint, to some extent – to question the social designation of who constitutes a criminal and what activities are in fact illegal that makes such figures potentially revolutionary ones.<sup>62</sup> As I have argued throughout, such struggles are waged at least in part through the landscape.

## Missing Malverde: the landscape of the empty signifier

Perhaps there is a secret life and a hidden Society of Saints and Virgins of which the Church is ignorant . . . And if people like to fill the lives of the saints and the virgins with all too human passions, displacing thereby the monologue inscribed by the Church, those same saints and virgins fill the landscape with meanings inscribed by the routes of their interrelation. Given that they are as human as they are sacred, it would not be correct to say they thus 'sanctify' spatial patterns, unless we endorse a notion of sanctity that endorses the strength of human weaknesses. If we do that then we can describe a 'sacred' contouring of land made from interconnected chips and fragments of place meanings.<sup>63</sup>

Like many bandits, including the Ur-bandit figure of Robin Hood, Jesús Malverde may be more of a legendary fabrication than a documentable historical figure. Sergio López-Sánchez suggests that Malverde is in fact a composite figure based in part on Heraclio Bernal, the so-called *Rayo de Sinaloa* (Thunderbolt of Sinaloa), who did live and die as an outlaw during the last half of the nineteenth century. Bernal, who raided foreign-owned silver mines in the state of Sinaloa and neighbouring Durango, channelled his thwarted political aspirations into multifarious critiques of the Díaz government, ranging from pranks played on the Porfirian state governor of Sinaloa to extensive raids on wealthy citizens and participation in revolts against the Díaz presidency.<sup>64</sup> Yet there is no archival evidence attesting to the existence of a flesh-and-blood Jesús Malverde, or Jesús Juárez Mazo for that matter.<sup>65</sup> Whether the saintly relics, Malverde's bones, lie at all in the supposed grave in the used car lot, in the chapel itself, in an unmarked grave, or simply never existed because Malverde never existed, is also a matter of some debate.<sup>66</sup>

I will propose that resolving the doubts about Malverde's existence as a documented historical figure is not, in fact, what is most important about him. The broader context of the ritual production, reproduction and contestation of the legend of Jesús Malverde, of the sacred spaces associated with Malverde, the relations of property ownership and identity surrounding these spaces, and the often complex power interests at stake are what make Malverde matter. In other words, it is the politics of the emergence and reinvention of Malverde – and the written record of this on the Sinaloan landscape – that is key to grasping the meaning and power of this figure, not the truth or falsity of his literal life and death.

In this, too, Malverde is not alone. Writing of bandit figures in general, Vanderwood asserts:

Many of these bandits may have actually lived and others been invented, but it makes no difference, for all are designed and periodically reshaped to fit the needs and imagination of the users. Most of these images are imbued with so much ambiguity and so many contradictions (which make them just that much more human) that they can be interpreted to symbolize almost anything.<sup>67</sup>

If the image of the bandit is so porous that it can be 'interpreted to symbolize almost anything', then the bandit becomes an empty signifier. 'An empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified.'<sup>68</sup> Malverde's legend, and the contested landscape associated with negotiations of this legend, are not backed by any 'real' signified: the tomb may be empty, and so are the archives. Indeed, a true-real Malverde becomes impossible within the system of signification of sacredness of which he forms the absent heart. '[T]here can be empty signifiers within the field of signification because any system of signification is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object which, none the less, is required by the systematicity of the system.'<sup>69</sup>

The limits of the system of sacredness itself cannot be signified directly; only in deciding by exclusion what is profane are these limits signalled, and as I have suggested in this essay, this process of excluding, of constructing a system of the sacred that is delimited by the profane, is a contentious, contextually variable and highly

political process. The grave, the legend, and the sociospatial negotiations of these empty vessels give rise to an infinite potentiality of meanings. The power, then, lies not with Jesús Malverde or the places associated with him. They are not inherently sacred. Rather, it is the repeated investment in them as sacred and the circulation, reinterpretation and contestation of these investments that lends the figure and his iconographic landscape the status of sacred.

It is precisely in the contentious imbrication of the representational and the material that the power of Malverde is manifest. The legend of this Sinaloan bandit is a narration of tradition, indeed most likely an invention of tradition, yet it has had an enduring capacity to shape and reshape historical memory, place identity and power relations at scales ranging from the inner landscape of popular religiosity to the body and associated ideas of physical and thus social normalcy, the social and physical shape of the urban landscape of Culiacán, the decomposition and recomposition of the Mexican state and the contemporary space of flows between Mexico and the USA.

Although 'the sacred' might be regarded as an empty signifier, a sign that by virtue of its emptiness could mean anything or nothing, its emptiness is filled with meaningful content as a result of specific strategies of symbolic engagement. Not merely interpretive, these symbolic strategies are powerful, practical maneuvers in the field of sacred symbols.<sup>70</sup>

Malverde's iconographic landscape is both the locus and the means of larger struggles over place, identity, historical memory, and belonging. It is in itself a space of disjuncture, and is *disruptive* inasmuch as it constitutes a recurring break in the texture of the landscape of officialdom. At the heart of the empty signifier is signification of absence, of that which is yearned for but never achieved. The nagging presence of Jesús Malverde in the symbolic and material landscapes of northern Mexico signals the persistent deferral of the voices and visions of the variously disenfranchised in those landscapes, and their refusal to go away. Malverde's iconographic landscape at once works to provide visibility and voice to those who are denied presence in the official landscapes of Church and State and remarks on their continued sublimation. In the outlaw landscape constructed and reconstructed around Malverde, the struggle for place, voice and identity continues to be waged in Culiacán, in Sinaloa, in Mexico, and amongst Mexican populations living in the United States.

## Acknowledgements

Field research in Culiacán, Mexico, was funded by a Florida International University Foundation summer research award and conducted during the summer of 2001. Manuel Valenzuela, Director of the Gender and Cultural Studies Center at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, generously shared his time and insights in Tijuana. Francois Debrix, Damián Fernández, Rod Neumann, Nick Onuf, Terry Rey and Alex Stepick at Florida International University provided helpful commentary on an earlier draft of this essay. Three anonymous reviewers for *cultural geographies*, and editor Mona Domosh, provided valuable suggestions for revision. All photos were taken by the author.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Existing published material in English on Jesús Malverde is almost entirely journalistic in nature. See e.g. A. Snow, 'Drug smugglers are saints to many in northern Mexico', *Detroit News* (4 Sept. 1995), [www.detnews.com/menu/stories/15394.htm](http://www.detnews.com/menu/stories/15394.htm) (accessed 10 June 2000); M. Jordan, 'Death of a Mexican village', *Washington Post* (28 Feb. 2001), p. A1; S. Quinones, *True tales from another Mexico: the lynch mob, the popsicle kings, Chalino, and the Bronx* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2001); H. LaFranchi, 'Robin Hoods? Drug lords try to cast saintly aura', *Christian Science Monitor* (15 June 1998), [www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/06/15/pls4.htm](http://www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/06/15/pls4.htm) (accessed 9 Oct. 2002). To my knowledge, there is nothing of an academic nature in English that attempts to contextualize this figure in a larger theoretical or historical framework, though see J. S. Griffith, 'A diversity of dead helpers: folk saints of the US–Mexico borderlands', in P. Stewart, S. Siporin, C. W. Sullivan III, and S. Jones, eds, *Worldviews and the American West: the life of the place itself* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 2000), for a largely descriptive account of Malverde, based on an examination of devotional cards. In Spanish, see Sergio López-Sánchez's excellent treatment of Jesús Malverde in 'Malverde: un bandido generoso', *Fronteras* 1 (1996), pp. 32–40. For a broader context, see the edited collection of border lore in J. M. Valenzuela Arce, ed., *Entre la magia y la historia: tradiciones, mitos y leyendas de la frontera* (Tijuana, Programa Cultural de las Fronteras, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1992), as well as the discussion of the mythology of narcotrafficking in Mexico by L. A. Astorga A., *Mitología del 'narcotraficante' en México* (Mexico City, Plaza y Valdés, 1995).
- <sup>2</sup> The period of Mexican president Porfirio Díaz's long rule, known as *el Porfiriato*, spanned nearly 35 years from 1876 to 1910. While *el Porfiriato* is credited with bringing stability and progress to the nation by imposing peace on Mexico's warring political factions, attracting foreign investment and developing Mexico's export sector and its attendant infrastructure, opposition to Díaz's continued re-election and massive social discontent amongst Mexico's peasantry culminated violently in the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17.
- <sup>3</sup> Cañedo is said to have died a mere 33 days after Malverde's assassination; reportedly after going out in the early morning dew in slippers and literally catching his death of a cold.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Malverde' is not a Spanish surname.
- <sup>5</sup> See P. Andreas, *Border games: policing the US–Mexico divide* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 51–84, for an in-depth discussion of the evolution of these alliances and US policy measures intended to deal with them.
- <sup>6</sup> Efraín Benítez Ayala, personal interview, Culiacán, Mexico, 25 July 2001. Eligio González, the shrine's builder and primary caretaker, was hospitalized with complications from diabetes during my visit.
- <sup>7</sup> If one wishes to ask Malverde for a favour, one first deposits a stone from one's place of residence and 'steals' a stone from the pile in the used car lot. When the favour has been granted, the 'stolen' stone is returned, along with thanks in the form of an offering of candles, flowers, money, live music or whatever else has been promised.
- <sup>8</sup> López-Sánchez, 'Malverde', p. 34.
- <sup>9</sup> Benítez Ayala, personal interview.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Efraín recounted being interviewed on several occasions, then seeing the published article with only the material associated with narcotrafficking remaining intact.
- <sup>11</sup> My translation. A. L. Hernández, 'Jesús Malverde: ángel de los pobres', n.d., [www.mit.edu/people/aelenes/sinaloa/narco/malverde/jesusmal.html](http://www.mit.edu/people/aelenes/sinaloa/narco/malverde/jesusmal.html) (accessed 15 Sept. 2003).



- <sup>12</sup> The idea of vernacular as opposed to official landscapes suffuses much of Jackson's work; see e.g. 'The vernacular city', in J. B. Jackson (ed. H. Lefkowitz Horowitz), *Landscape in sight: looking at America* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 237–47.
- <sup>13</sup> When speaking of Mexico's social, political, economic and cultural context, I use the term 'landscape' loosely to refer to the metaphorical context or imaginary at work, rather than the physical landscape more narrowly understood. Clearly, the iconographic and literal senses of 'landscape' are connected.
- <sup>14</sup> The level of awareness of the legend of Jesús Malverde is as strikingly apparent inside the state of Sinaloa and its environs as it is absent in Mexico more generally. I received blank looks when I asked about Malverde in north-eastern and central Mexico, yet he is a familiar figure along Mexico's northern Pacific coast. Thus he is most properly a sub-regional figure. For a discussion of sub-regionality, see D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: a Mexican American cultural province* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002).
- <sup>15</sup> J. B. Jackson, 'By way of conclusion: how to study the landscape', in *Landscape in sight*, p. 309.
- <sup>16</sup> Essentially the same version of this story appears in López Sánchez, 'Malverde', Quinones, *True tales*, Lizárraga Hernández, 'Jesús Malverde' and LaFranchi, 'Robin Hoods?', and these are largely consistent with the versions told to me by Efraín Benítez Ayala (personal interview) and Juan, a Culiacán taxi driver and Malverde devotee who did not wish to use his last name; personal interview, Culiacán, Mexico, 26 July 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> My translation, López-Sánchez, 'Malverde', p. 37.
- <sup>18</sup> Manuel Lazcano Ochoa, lifetime Sinaloan resident and politician, tells a slightly different tale. In Lazcano Ochoa's version, the bulldozer did not break down. Rather, it unearthed a coffer full of triangular gold coins dating from time of the Spanish sovereign Ferdinand VII. Lazcano Ochoa makes clear that he does not believe any of the mythology surrounding Malverde. See M. Lazcano Ochoa, *Una vida en la vida sinaloense* (Los Mochis, Mexico, Universidad de Occidente, 1992), esp. pp. 216–19.
- <sup>19</sup> J. C. Scott, 'Foreword,' in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds, *Everyday forms of state formation: revolution and the negotiation of rule in modern Mexico* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1994), p. vii.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. xi.
- <sup>21</sup> E. Chávez, 'En Sinaloa, el hampa hasta "santo patrón" tiene: Toledo Corro hereda a Labastida un estado sumido en el delito', *Proceso* 501 (9 June 1988), p. 16.
- <sup>22</sup> López-Sánchez, 'Malverde', p. 38.
- <sup>23</sup> My translation, Sergio Morales, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>24</sup> My translation, Eligio González, quoted in Lizárraga Hernández, 'Jesús Malverde'.
- <sup>25</sup> Arreola, *Tejano South Texas*, esp. pp. 176–82.
- <sup>26</sup> For an account of Juan Soldado and his role in Tijuana history, see J. Manuel Valenzuela Arce, 'Por los milagros recibidos: religiosidad popular a través del culto a Juan Soldado', in Valenzuela Arce, *Entre la magia y la historia*, pp. 76–87.
- <sup>27</sup> Unlike Malverde, however, none of these figures was in his lifetime a bandit. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, the peculiar metamorphosis from outlaw to lay saint is common to only one other figure beside Malverde: Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, the legendary Mexican revolutionary general. Villa is considered *un alma* (soul) that possesses mediums at séances. See Griffith, 'A diversity of dead helpers', p. 48.
- <sup>28</sup> My translation. Lizárraga Hernández, 'Jesús Malverde'.

- <sup>29</sup> My translation. Quoted in *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> For an overview, see P. Winn, *Americas: the changing face of Latin America and the Caribbean*, updated edn (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), pp. 353–93.
- <sup>31</sup> For an account of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, and an exploration of the symbolic significance of this event to indigenous Mexican and Iberian peoples of the time, see J. Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: faith and empowerment among Mexican-American women* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 16–46. For an account of the subsequent intertwining of the Virgin's image and the formation of the Mexican state, see C. Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, silent Mexico: an anthropology of nationalism* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 3–34. David Brading, in his comprehensive *Mexican phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: image and tradition across five centuries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), documents the controversy and scepticism historically surrounding the official acceptance of Virgin of Guadalupe by the Catholic Church.
- <sup>32</sup> See e.g. J. S. Duncan, *The city as text: the politics of landscape interpretation in the Kandyian kingdom* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), and T. Edensor, 'National identity and the politics of memory: remembering Bruce and Wallace in symbolic space', *Environment and planning D: society and space* 29 (1997), pp. 175–94.
- <sup>33</sup> See e.g. Y.-F. Tuan, *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1974), K. R. Olwig, *Nature's ideological landscape* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1984), and D. Cosgrove, *Social formation and symbolic landscape* (Totowa, NJ, Barnes & Noble, 1985).
- <sup>34</sup> See e.g. C. Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths and monuments* (Oxford, Berg, 1994), S. Schama, *Landscape and memory* (New York, Knopf, 1995), P. Sheldrake, *Spaces for the sacred: place, memory, and identity* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and B. Lane, *Landscapes of the sacred: geography and narrative in American spirituality*, expanded edn (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
- <sup>35</sup> M. Eliade, trans. W. R. Trask, *The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion* (New York, Harper & Row, 1959).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- <sup>37</sup> Lane, *Landscapes of the sacred*, p. 48. As Lane notes, Eliade's successor at the University of Chicago, Jonathan Z. Smith, has been critical of his predecessor's foundational work. See J. Z. Smith, *Map is not territory* (Leiden, Brill, 1978).
- <sup>38</sup> Lane, *Landscapes of the sacred*, p. 48.
- <sup>39</sup> D. Chidester and E. T. Linenthal, 'Introduction', in Chidester and Linenthal, eds, *American sacred space* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 1–42.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
- <sup>41</sup> Quinones, *True tales*, p. 226.
- <sup>42</sup> For discussions of this history, see Andreas, *Border games*, and Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas I., 'Mexico's permanent campaign: costs, benefits, implications', in P. H. Smith, ed., *Drug policy in the Americas* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992), pp. 151–77.
- <sup>43</sup> LaFranchi, 'Robin Hoods?', Quinones, *True tales*, López-Sánchez, 'Malverde'. Juan, the Culiacán taxi driver, said he had seen a shrine to Malverde in Guatemala; personal interview.
- <sup>44</sup> LaFranchi, 'Robin Hoods?' For a fascinating discussion of the phenomenon of *narco-corridos*, the wildly popular and controversial ballads written to lionize drug king-pins, see E. Wald, *Narcocorrido: a journey into the music of drugs, guns, and guerrillas* (New York, HarperCollins, 2001). In Spanish, see J. M. Valenzuela Arce, *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en México* (Barcelona, Plaza y Janés, 2002).

- <sup>45</sup> Snow, 'Drug smugglers'.
- <sup>46</sup> Niko Price, 'Fallen drug lord comes from long line in cradle of Mexican drug trade', *News-Times International News* (21 July 1997) [www.newstimes.com/archive97/jul2197/ina.htm](http://www.newstimes.com/archive97/jul2197/ina.htm) (accessed 20 Sept. 2001).
- <sup>47</sup> Thoumi, 'The economic impact of narcotics in Colombia'.
- <sup>48</sup> Wald, *Narcocorrido*, p. 54.
- <sup>49</sup> Quoted in LaFranchi, 'Robin Hoods?'
- <sup>50</sup> G. M. Joseph, 'On the trail of Latin American bandits: a reexamination of peasant resistance', *Latin American research review* **25** (1990), p. 25.
- <sup>51</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, 3rd edn (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1971).
- <sup>52</sup> Joseph, 'On the trail'.
- <sup>53</sup> Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels*, p. 24.
- <sup>54</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, rev. edn (New York, New Press, 2000), p. 162. Again, the much better-known figure of Pancho Villa is consistent with this notion.
- <sup>55</sup> See e.g. Joseph, 'On the trail'; the subsequent set of responses to Joseph by Richard Slatta, 'Bandits and rural social history: a comment on Joseph', *Latin American research review* **26** (1991), pp. 145–51; P. Singelmann, 'Establishing a trail in the labyrinth', *Latin American research review* **26** (1991), pp. 152–5; C. Birkbeck, 'Latin American banditry as peasant resistance: a dead-end trail?', *Latin American research review* **26** (1991), pp. 156–60; and Joseph's reply to his critics in G. M. Joseph, "'Resocializing" Latin American banditry: a reply', *Latin American research review* **26** (1991), pp. 161–74. This essay adds a geographer's perspective to suggestions for ongoing investigation of banditry, a discussion that thus far has largely been conducted, at least in the Latin Americanist camp, amongst historians. To the best of my knowledge, there has been next to no discussion about the spatial or landscape negotiation of banditry in Latin America.
- <sup>56</sup> Noted Mexicanist historian Friedrich Katz asserts that Mexico is unique amongst American nations inasmuch as rural uprisings are always closely linked with national revolutions; see F. Katz, 'Introduction: rural revolts in Mexico', in F. Katz ed., *Riot, rebellion, and revolution: rural social conflict in Mexico* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 3–17.
- <sup>57</sup> My translation; Valenzuela Arce, *Jefe de jefes*, p. 20.
- <sup>58</sup> P. J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and progress: bandits, police, and Mexican development*, rev. and enlarged edn (Wilmington, DE, Scholarly Resources, 1992).
- <sup>59</sup> See G. Joseph and D. Nugent, 'Popular culture and state formation in revolutionary Mexico' in Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday forms of state formation*, pp. 3–23.
- <sup>60</sup> For a discussion of the various theories of connections amongst Mexico's politicians, police, and narcotraffickers, see A. Oppenheimer, *Bordering on chaos: Mexico's roller-coaster journey towards prosperity* (Boston, Bay Back, 1998), esp. pp. 298–312.
- <sup>61</sup> Vanderwood, *Disorder and progress*, p. xxxvi.
- <sup>62</sup> By making this assertion, I am in no way condoning the frequently despicable acts of violence performed by the drug lords.
- <sup>63</sup> M. Taussig, *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 203.
- <sup>64</sup> See Vanderwood, *Disorder and progress*, pp. 92–4, for an overview of Heraclio Bernal.
- <sup>65</sup> Lizárraga Hernández, 'Jesús Malverde'.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Vanderwood, *Disorder and progress*, p. xix.

<sup>68</sup> E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London, Verso, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Chidester and Linenthal, 'Introduction', pp. 18–19.